

Utilizing Blogs within Library and Information Science Curriculum: A Case Study of the Department of Information Studies, Oman

Salim Said Al kindi

Assistant Professor

Department of Information Studies
College of Arts and Social Sciences
Sultan Qaboos University
salimsk@squ.edu.om

Mohammed Nasser Al-Suqri

Associate Professor

Department of Information Studies
College of Arts and Social Sciences
Sultan Qaboos University
saqrim@squ.edu.om

Abstract

Various online tools including social media tools have helped academics in improving their teaching in an interdisciplinary environment increasing engagement of students as active learners. The actual use and impact of these tools such as blogs within LIS curriculum is not yet fully understood. The aims of this paper are to explore the actual use of blogs in the classroom; and student attitudes and their perceptions of learning using blogs in the classroom. A semi-structured interview was the method of research that used to gather qualitative information in this study. This involved one academic and a group of students. Data collection methods in the case also included review/analysis of secondary data. Main findings showed that most students and the instructor reported positively on their experiences regarding the use of blogs within higher education. They reported that blogging leads to improved communication and collaboration activities. The study also found that most students reported that blogs gave them the ability to understand the course content by searching for the information from various sources and then organizing it in the blogs. Review/analysis of secondary data also found that students were more likely to learn about blogs, not within blogs. Male students were less likely to have an intention to use blogs in the future compared with females. The main barrier that faced students using blogs was the quality of the internet services, such as a slow internet connection.

Keyword: Web 2.0, Blogs, Library and Information Science, LIS Curriculum, Classroom, Learning Environment, Sultan Qaboos University.

Introduction

Social media and online tools have emerged as powerful tools for higher education and individual institutions, such as universities and colleges for the purposes of collaborative work and communication, and they impacted many disciplines and fields. There are many studies discussing the potential of various online tools in all education sectors for transforming education (e.g., Downes, 2004; Thompson, 2007; Brown & Adler, 2008; Collis & Moonen, 2008; Richardson, 2009). As such, there are many studies and research investigated students' attitudes towards the use of social media and online technologies such as blogs (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009; Shih, 2011; Hourigan & Murray, 2010; Deng & Yuen, 2011, Yang & Chang, 2012). For example, blogging is used in class for discussions, to quickly give feedback to students, to update new information, to post assignments and homework and to post comments and questions related to a specific subject.

Despite the growing number of papers on the use of social media and online tools such as blogs, the full abilities and actual uses of these technologies for teaching and learning practise are yet to be established, and many questions are still unanswered. The use of these technologies by academics in supporting the curriculum are still far from clear and needs to be fully addressed. More specifically, within LIS or Information Studies (IS) programs, the effectiveness and usage of online technologies and tools is not yet clearly understood. When combined, these factors indicate that there is a gap in the literature with regard to the utilizing of online tools in teaching and learning practice. In order to address this issue, this research study explores the utilize of blogs by LIS academics and students in teaching and learning practice, in addition to a combination of students and academics' views.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- Explore the actual use of blogs in the classroom; and
- Explore student attitudes and the perceptions of learning using blogs in the classroom.

Research Questions

Among other things, the study attempts to answer the following broad questions:

- What is the attitude/perception of LIS students towards using blogs within LIS Curriculum?
- What are the main challenges, if any, to utilizing blogs within LIS Curriculum?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for researchers and educators. Exploring the use of blogs in teaching and learning will help to explore different issues, whether related to student learning or to academic achievement and development. In doing so, the study will identify issues that may need in-depth investigation in utilizing various online tools within LIS curriculum. This will help researchers in the field of information studies to investigate these issues, and it will open new doors of critical research in regard to higher education.

Review of the Literature

There are many studies that highlight how social media and various online tools have influenced learning and teaching in higher education. Within these studies, scholars focused more on particular online tools in teaching, such as blogs, and they have revealed how academics and students use these tools in education and for collaborative learning. For example, Ray and Hocutt (2006) conducted a study of 16 teachers who blog- and they found that blogs support reflective practice, collaboration and social interaction among educators. Similar results were found by Shihab (2009). Additionally, blogs are used as reflective learning tools and a new method of communication in higher education (see Farmer, Yue & Brooks, 2008; Wolf, 2010; Hovorka & Ress, 2009).

A study by Sendall, Geccucci and Peslak (2008) studied classroom implementation of Web 2.0 applications such as blogs at three north-eastern US universities. It was found that professors at these universities used blogs for student assignments, and students had the opportunity to tag articles on the proliferation of blogs and wikis. Sendall et al. (2008) concluded that Web 2.0 is useful for assignments. Churchill (2009) added that academics use blogs to help their students access course materials and post their reflections. The study also found that students were blogging because of assessment requirement, tasks set through the course required the use of blogs and

facilitator was blogging as well. The study concluded that students were less willing to continue using this tool in their learning in the future on their own. Many teachers also create their own blogs and encourage students to post and participate in those venues (Shihab, 2009). By using these online tools, students can access homework and lectures and can watch documentaries about what they are learning.

Another study by Sarrafzadeh, Hazeri and Alavi (2010), exploring the use of Web 2.0 by LIS academics in Iran, argue that LIS academics had good level of familiarity with blogs, wikis, YouTube and Facebook, and limited familiarity with RSS feeds, Twitter, Flickr, Delicious and podcasts. The study also found that LIS academics use some of these tools in teaching. For example, blogs, discussion groups, chat tools, file sharing tools, wikis, video sharing tools and forums were used in teaching. In addition, five LISDs in Australia, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom responded to the impact of online tools by introducing those services to students as curriculum topics and as tools for teaching and learning (Bawden et al., 2007). Luo (2009) provided a good example of how librarians used online tools/Web 2.0 in the LIS curriculum. In that study, online tools were adopted and used to organise and deliver content in information literacy courses. In those courses, librarians used blogs to publish new content or review lectures notes. They also used a wiki as a place to organise teaching materials, to hold discussions, and to deliver content. They used social bookmarking to locate, organise, and share web resources about courses content. They used YouTube to create videos to show students how to access and use library databases and other resources and uploaded videos for the class to view.

There are several problems related to the academic community in regards to the use of these tools. For example, Tekinarslan (2008) noticed a few problems while investigating the use of blogs in an undergraduate class for teaching and learning. He noted that some students, for example, copy information from online sources and just paste it into their blogs without mentioning the sources. He reported his experience by saying that “some students plagiarised by copying and pasting from the online resources without paraphrasing and without citing any references when creating the content of their blogs”. The study recommended that all students should be notified about copyright issues regarding the content for blogs.

With the different uses of blogs, the utilizing and adoption of blogging started to decline in recent years. In a major study by Popescu (2010), investigated students' attitudes towards the use of online tools/Web 2.0 such as blogs in a Romanian university, found students are relatively familiar with these tools and applications, and a large majority of them reported willingness and enthusiasm towards the wide-scale introduction of Web 2.0 applications in education. However, according to that study, most of the students are primarily consumers, not producers, of web content. The study indicated that only five students out of 30 kept blogs and only five had contributed to a wiki before the course. This result is consistent with Barnes and Lescault (2012) who found that the adoption of blogging started to decline in 2007 among the Inc. 500 companies (a monthly publication focused on growing companies in the US), the use of blogging dropped to 37% in 2011. As such, results of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, which examines social media use among teens and young adults, indicates that teen blogging is on the decline, and nearly three quarters (73%) of online teens and a similar proportion (72%) of young adults use SNSs (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010).

Other studies have also found differences between males and females in regard to blogging. For example, Pedersen and Macafee (2007) conducted a study of 48 female and male bloggers in order to explore their practices and attitudes regarding blogging. Data were collected using questionnaires and from their blogs. The study found that both females and males are blogging mainly as a leisure activity, and they find the same range of satisfactions in blogging. However, women were more likely to blog as an outlet for creative work. Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier and Perez (2009) found in a study among U.S. college students that "female college students appear hardly more likely than male college students to keep a blog as 34% of females compared with 31% of males' kept blogs" (p. 255). The study also found that female students were more concerned about privacy than male students, they were very concerned or somewhat concerned about their personal data online, however, they participated equally online and their concern did not affect their online activities. The study concluded that the most frequent uses of time online is for communicating socially and females were more likely to do this rather than males. There are other important

studies investigating gender differences towards the use of blogs or blogging (e.g., Liu & Chang, 2010; Lu & Hsiao, 2009; Huffaker, 2004).

Study Design and Instrumentation

Data collection methods in the case study included interviews and review/analysis of secondary data. The case study aimed to explore the adoption and use of online tools within particular units that have already been taken by students. It included interviewing an academic regarding the implementation of blogs in the classroom and interviewing the students to reflect on their experiences and attitudes towards these applications as encountered in their course. This was conducted in three steps:

- Semi-structured interview. This involved one academic. The interview included questions on unit description and syllabus; the type of online activities students work on in the classroom or for assignments. A form was designed to gather information from the interviewee. This form included the name of a technology or application used; learning objectives; advantages and disadvantages of using this application within the course; assignments and assessment, and difficulties and barriers.
- Review and analysis of secondary data. This included the course materials, assignments and other activities. However, there were no available documents besides the course description and a list of students' projects.
- Student group interview. In this step, the researcher gained the permission and assistance of the academic to select a sample group of students (10, 5 Female and 5 Male) who have completed the relevant course to obtain their feedback on the use of online tools in the classroom. The selection of the students for group discussion was based on a discussion between the researcher and the faculty member of the DIS. This interview included three main points to discuss: (1) learning in this course with this application; (2) willingness to use this application in the future; and (3) difficulties in learning with this application.

The interviews took place in September/October 2012. One academic and ten students in the DIS at SQU were invited to participate in separate interviews. SoundNote and

iTalk applications were used to record the interviews. The interviewees chose an appropriate time and place for the interview. Although interviews were the primary method of data collection in the case, the researcher also collected and reviewed documents in order to provide thorough descriptions of the case and to clarify or substantiate participants' statements.

Content analysis was used to extract themes and typical responses from textual data from respondents. The researcher summarized the themes that emerged from student responses. The transcribed focus group interviews were coded to thematically organize the students' responses. The coded statements were used to identify themes that emerged in student and academic responses.

Results/Findings

Brief Description of the Case

The interviewee (instructor) used and adopted blogs through teaching two IS courses, Information Technology and Subject Analysis Courses. In the first course, the instructor aimed to teach students how to establish and design a blog, adding all the necessary characteristics to create an effective blog for publishing and creating content. Students were required to shape their blogs for their learning and to support their course understanding. According to the conversation held between the instructor and the researcher, the main purposes of the adoption and use of blogs by the instructor in the first course were to:

- Provide students with the ability to explore and use newer technology through discovering blogs and the possibility of shaping them in personal use; and
- Provide students with the ability to design a blog and explore its functions and characteristics rather than use it for participation and discussion of topics related to the course. This included learning how to design an effective blog, using all possible characteristics and functions available on the blogs, and to give them an opportunity to 'own' and 'manage' their learning experiences within and across courses.

During the 15 week semester the design of blogs went through different stages. In the first stage, which took six weeks, students were asked to establish and create their own blogs. In the second stage of the course, which took a six further weeks, students

were asked to demonstrate creativity and innovation in designing blogs through learning and applying new features to their blogs, for example, adding an RSS feed to the blog. The assessment in this stage was of their ability to make innovative use of different characteristics and features available in the blogs.

In the second course, the students were asked to show their understanding and support the course content by adding and creating content related to specific topics in the course in their blogs. The course was focused on the thesaurus and related topics; therefore, the students were required to select topics related to this domain in order to expand their knowledge in this area and create blogs with learning functions. This required students to search the information and review the literature in order to expand their knowledge in the selected topic, and then organize and manage the content on the blog; it was an assignment presented as a blog rather than a paper. This assignment was worth 10 marks out of the total marks for the course.

In this stage, the students did not assess the design of their blogs, but through their ability to add and create content, adding resources, links, and participation, and design a blog on a specific topic which helped others understand and gain relevant knowledge. At the end of the semester, students were required to present their blogs to other students and explain how it helped them to support their course understanding, using either Microsoft PowerPoint or browsing their blogs.

The instructor explained the main purpose of using blogs in both courses as follows:

The aim of establishing the blog in the first place was just to train students how to design it, therefore I did not specify a particular topic, and I gave the students the freedom to choose the topics they wanted, regardless of their specialization topics... The aim of establishing the blog was to qualify students to deal with this type of application, and to prepare scientific research through the student's ability to make use of the blog for this purpose, which means converting the research and integrating it into the blog, focusing on: the research topic, introduction, links, pictures, and relevant video... Then the students move to the other course where the blogs are being run effectively, giving the students the opportunity to communicate by seeing the other blogs and commenting on the content. This process is considered to be an investment

in what was covered in the first stage... One of the blog's objectives is to facilitate the communication process, by giving the students the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with each other...

Interview Findings

Data from the interviews and reviewed documents were combined in the analysis in order to produce greater insight and findings. While the interview findings indicate the students' and academics' attitudes towards this online tool (adopting blogs in the classroom or within the curriculum), the documents and other online activities can offer other results that might demonstrate successful use, or otherwise, with regard to what the academics and students reported. The section is divided in three main sub-sections as follows:

- Learning in this course with this tool;
- Difficulties in learning with this tool; and
- Willingness to use this tool in the future.

Learning within a Blog

Blog and Learning Process

Students were asked about learning with blogs. Six out of ten students reported that using blogs within education was a good experience and support the educational process. The students showed a positive attitude towards using blogs within the course. Few examples are provided below:

A blog is considered a recently emerging communication tool. It is an interactive tool that allows us to comment and add content. In my opinion, blogging is very important to us regarding the learning process, it enriches the discussion between us as well as information sharing. (S 1)

Learning with the blog created a suitable environment where I could communicate and collaborate with my peers. In addition, the blog created a network with others through their participation with my blog and commenting on the content. (S 2)

A blog is an important application in the learning process because of the diversity of the methods of displaying information and the possibility of sharing it with others. (S 7)

The instructor was also asked about using blogs within the courses:

Using blogs can support the learning process by allowing for communication and cooperation among the students. These tools can be used as a channel for communication and for information and knowledge sharing. For the professor, the blogs contribute to the diversification of the teaching methods and support interaction with the students. This did not exist and was not available before, thus the process of communication became better and more effective by using these tools...a blog contributes to the educational process by improving the student's ability to write through his search to gain knowledge. A blog is a tool that helps students to understand the course better; when we ask the students to write about the thesaurus, its forms and its classification methods, the students will gain an in-depth knowledge of these subjects.

However, two students claimed that blogs were not examined appropriately in the course. For example, one student claimed that:

In this course, the study of blogging was focused on design...without activating its role in education, for example, supporting the educational process or learning process. (S 3)

In summary, it seems that blogging helps students in their learning and to improve their communication and interaction with others. This reflects a positive response to the use of these tools in higher education.

Online Communication and Collaborative Learning

Students were asked about collaboration and communication activities using blog online tool. The question was whether blogs make contributions to improve communication and collaboration activities. The main purposes for asking this question were to explore the contribution of these tools in communication and collaboration activities and to compare these findings with the results from interview. All students participated in discussing this point, except one who had no opinion. Five students explained explicitly that blogs helped them communicate and collaborate with their peers, claiming that blogging offered a new opportunity for collaboration through working together and sharing knowledge and experience. Examples are provided below:

The blog environment gave me a chance to have intimacy and cooperation with my colleagues in order to create the blogs by working with each other where each of us has certain experience, different styles, and special ways of using and designing blogs. This allowed for some cooperation between us in the process of setting up the blogs, expressing our views, and bringing our different viewpoints relating to the design, structure, and inclusion of topics. By doing this, a blog will establish a communication network between us through the other participation and comments on my blog as well as my comments on other blogs. I think that the blog added another way of cooperation made available to us ... (S 2)

On the educational side, the blogs helped in having positive interaction. It actually increased the level of the course by helping me to participate more in the course and to communicate with others by sharing our experiences and different viewpoints. (S 10)

The blogs are a new method of communication between me and the participants, to take advantage of the comments and to exchange opinions about the topics that are listed in the blogs. (S 9)

Regarding communication and collaboration, it is considered one of the interactive applications that allow a person to communicate with others through comments and postings. Furthermore, a blog can be a way to cooperate, for example, in exchanging and sharing information. (S 3)

The instructor reflected on this by reporting that:

...Using blogs enhances the process of communication and cooperation among students, which generates more interaction both between student-student or student-professor by discussing the problems and putting forward various related issues...I think that blogs play an important role in students learning through knowledge sharing and participating in the content, and therefore I am convinced that this is a successful tool for sharing information.

On the other hand, one student believed that there was only a superficial level of cooperation involved in using the online tool:

I think there was no cooperation, because the students' participation on this application was only because of assessment, only for evaluation and to get good marks. (S 6)

Another student reported that the course focused more on the design side rather than using and shaping blogs for discussion and communication purposes.

...in this course, the blog was a project we accomplished and we did not have the opportunity to deepen the interaction more... We used the blog as an assignment in another course and it facilitated the process of understanding and capturing information easily, because it contains text, images, and forms. (S 1)

Two other students made a similar point:

I can say from my point of view that the objective of teaching us the blogs was to design a blog. I think that using the blogs taught me some new features, for example, how to bring information from the source and interact with the audience. However, I did not find it as interactive as it is supposed to be. (S 8)

There was no time for cooperation because most of our time went into the establishment of the blog. It was designed for the purpose of the course. The course ended and we did not use it for the process of interacting and the exchanging of opinions...I think that the main objective of the course was to design a blog, not for discussion... according to this course, the blogs were focused on the design side only, so its benefit was limited to the design without activating its actual role in education. (S 3)

Table 2 below provides a list of blogs created by students. A review of these online blogs showed that no comments were posted by students in their blogs or even in other students' blogs. Most students created blogs and added content to their blogs regarding topics discussed in the classroom by the instructor. However, very few blogs were blocked after course completion.

Table 1: Examples of Students' Blogs

Student	Title of the assignment	Blocked by students	Posts by others
A	List of standard Arabic Subject Headings	No	No comments were found on the site
B	Thesaurus of Waqf Sciences	No	No comments were found on the site
C	Thesaurus of Waqf Sciences	No	No comments were found on the site
D	Agricultural thesaurus	Yes, blog not found	
E	Thesaurus of folklore	No	No comments were found on the site
F	Comprehensive Thesaurus	No	No comments were found on the site
G	Thesaurus	No	No comments were found on the site
H	Expanded thesaurus22	No	No comments were found on the site

I	Expanded thesaurus	No	No comments were found on the site
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It appears that some students may block others from posting content. All students used the blogs to publish the content related to their discussion topics in the classroom. As noted above, other students blogged due to assessment requirements. They reported that the benefit of using blogs was limited to the course as everyone stopped blogging after course completion. For example, one student reported that:

I would like to talk about my self-evaluation regarding the use of blogs in this course. I got benefits from blogging, however, this benefit was limited to the course and we stopped doing this (blogging) after the course ended. (S 4)

It was also apparent from the blogs reviewed that most students used a variety of ways to design their blogs and add relevant content using different sources. It is important to note that most students reported that blogs were easy to design, and this was observed from reviewing the blogs (see Figure 1). However, it was found that students did not participate in their peers' blogs and most spent their time establishing and adding content to their own blogs without participating and posting content on others.

Annotations on the screenshot:

- Content titles:** Points to the list of book titles in Arabic.
- Sources: books titles:** Points to the list of book titles.
- Search box:** Points to the search input field labeled 'بحث هذه الممنوعة الإلكترونية'.
- Links:** Points to the 'Library of congress Online Catalogs' link.
- Archive:** Points to the footer section 'أرشيف الممنوعة الإلكترونية'.

Figure 1: Applying Different Characteristics of Blogs in Designing

Understanding Course Content: “Owning” and “Managing”

Most of the students reported that blogs gave them the ability to understand the course content by searching for the information from various sources and organizing it in the blogs. They were able to use different characteristics which support content, including images and videos. For example, one student reported that blogs worked as multimedia by combining text, images, and video, with different content forms:

...if we go back to the information that we got from the papers or printed materials, in this case, we cannot add these explanatory materials to the discussed topic, such as pictures, videos, and so on. However, a blog gives us a chance to interact through the possibility of adding various images and video, and uses a combination of different content forms, which allows more interaction. Consequently, when we browse or navigate these blogs we can read the text and watch a video that relates to the text at the same time, and we can comment and add notes about the topic. (S 4)

The use of blogs as multimedia to support understanding of course content makes blogging a popular tool for students. For example, three students reported that:

My point is that the blog is a tool, a technique, and a new method that can be used in education, specifically in preparing lectures and lessons, instead of using other traditional tools such as PowerPoint, which becomes boring because in most cases its use overstates ... the blog grabs the learners' attention since it is a new tool for them, and that in itself will put the information forward. This will increase the consolidation of the information in the student's mind through participation and discussion. This is a unique feature that makes a blog different from other tools... (S 2)

The blogs helped me to understand the course's content better, by delivering information using multimedia, such as videos, images, audio, and text. The learner needs a shorter time to understand the material through it because a picture can express a thousand words, and as I mentioned before, it includes multimedia...it facilitated so many things and gave me a chance to publish my information, which I have and I want to share with others and get benefits from the other material published by others. (S 9)

... it seemed to add value because of the fact that it brings together more than one form (a combination of text, images, video, etc.). You can integrate video with an image with text, for example, to add specific information, and this can

contribute to the enrichment of the courses, but only if they apply it appropriately. (S 3)

An objective of the instructor was to change the teaching style and the way of delivering course content to the students, through giving students the ability to own and manage their blogs:

When one method or tool is used in teaching, the students will get bored and the information will be stored in their minds from the same perspective each time. Therefore, using more than one way to teach is recommended to facilitate the process of information access in the students' minds. For example, the results of using the method of memorization or displaying information only leads to a kind of non-acceptance of the content by the student due to the ineffectiveness of the method used to deliver the information, while the use of different techniques and tools makes it easier for the students to receive the information and consolidate it in their minds. Therefore, different methods of delivering information to students should be used. One of the successful methods is by using blogs, for they provide an opportunity for students to express and write and contribute by searching for information...students must contribute to the reinforcement of their knowledge by researching and participating in creating knowledge.

Blog Characteristics as an Open Platform

Students were asked about the possibility of using blogs within the course and in future workplaces, and about blog characteristics not found in traditional LMSs. Four important characteristics of blogs were reported by the students: it remains “on” before, during, and after course completion; allows the freedom to add content, customise profile pages, and own workspaces; provides more privacy options; and is easy to use. For example, most students found that the blogs were more useful in terms of facilitating students' participation and discussions on platforms that will be available to them after graduation. For example, two students reported the following:

It actually increases the level of the course and helps us to participate and communicate with others in sharing our experiences and different viewpoints. My point of view is that blogs have a positive side and are more interactive than Moodle. (S 10)

Compared with Moodle, blogs are considered the best in the learning process due to different features that are not found in Moodle, and which facilitate our participation and discussions after course completion. (S 7)

Two other students reported that blogs are an open gate which can be accessed after course completion. For example, the female student reported:

By comparing it to Moodle, it is more useful than Moodle because it can be accessed at any time whenever there is internet service. Unlike Moodle, which ends after course completion. (S 1)

Similarly, another student reported:

The blog helps the person to learn and display his ideas and to discuss them with others at any time. From my personal viewpoint, the blog helps me to find information, as it contributes to sharing information when participating with others. The blog is good for communication and presenting ideas and for circulating the information... (S 6)

Other students reported that the blogs gave them more opportunities and options to manage their learning experiences through the freedom to add content, customise profile pages, own workspaces, and allow the use of pseudonyms.

I found it better than Moodle, whether in the way of finding information. It was more attractive to use, and easier navigation...in terms of organize and classify the topics and the possibility of evaluating it. It gives us the opportunity to create various links, which enables users to move to different topics or other blogs about the same area. (S 3)

... blog allows me to have a discussion by introducing some of the topics and discussing them with my colleagues. It gives me the chance to hide my name by using an alias or pseudonym. This gives us an opportunity to have more freedom of expression compared to Moodle, which is a formal tool in education that shows the student's name and statements, especially for some of us who are shy about communicating face to face. (S 2)

The fact that the blog is a way to avoid censorship in spreading information and it gives individuals freedom of expression. Thus, it contributes much to solving some problems or making decisions about the posed issue... (S 7)

The instructor also added that blogging provided more privacy properties than other online tools, such as Facebook which has a strict policy against the use of pseudonyms. He reported that:

A blog provides students with a group of options, such as the ability to access these blogs on the internet or maintain the user's privacy in the case that it is not available on the network. What characterizes blogs from other Web 2.0 applications like Facebook is the availability of the privacy properties... Most of the privacy properties are not available in the other social networks, such as Facebook, and because of our society's nature, customs, and traditions, many of the female students avoid using some of the other applications that may reveal their identities or personal information. They usually use nicknames when designing blogs for reasons related to their privacy, including the dissemination of information and sharing personal data, and other cultural and social factors.

All students reported that blogs were easy to use and there was no need for advanced skills to learn how to design them or to add content. For example, three of them reported the following:

In addition to the possibility of commenting on the topics and the interaction between the blogger and readers where they relay their views and perspectives on the subject. A blog is easy to use in terms of design and navigation. (S 10)

Using blogs is very easy in terms of design (S 9)

...the process of designing a blog was a new experience for me; it was not difficult, but so easy and flexible. Any student can design a blog, they do not need to have skills such as designing a site using different software. (S 4)

However, one male student found Moodle to be more effective in terms of participation:

I say that Moodle is more effective than blogging according to my use; I use Moodle and do practice on it more than using and practicing on blogs. (S 8)

Another male student pointed out that he did not take advantages of using blogs with regard to the participation and interaction. He reported that:

I believe that the use of blogs in our society is a good thing, but this depends on how we use it. Will internet services in our community be available everywhere, so that the beneficiary can post other comments at any time? What I learned from the blog was knowledge regarding design. However, in terms of participation and interaction, I did not take advantage of these for a number of reasons, such as the students, instructor, and other things. (S 6)

In response to the question of his role in the process, the instructor replied:

I have not added comments, but I would encourage this process among the students themselves. They were asked to comment on the blogs of their colleagues, thus creating a social network among the students. The role of the teacher is in the process of evaluation.

Willingness to Use Blogs in the Future

Students were asked about their willingness to use blogs in the future. Nine students discussed this point, but one male student did not participate in the discussion as he had no opinion regarding this. Six of the remaining nine showed their willingness to use blogs in the future as shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Respondents' Willingness to Use Blogs in the Future

Number	Gender	Respondents' Willingness to Use Blogs in the Future		
		Yes	No	No opinion, or do not know
S 1	F	*		
S 2	M			*
S 3	F	*		
S 4	M	*		
S 5	M		*	
S 6	M		*	
S 7	F	*		
S 8	M		*	

S 9	F	*		
S 10	F	*		
Total	10	6	2	2
		F=5; M=1	F=0; M=3	F=0; M=1

For example, one male student reported that:

I really have the desire to use this type of application because it will add a new dimension to the institution where I will work, especially as a marketing tool.

(S 4)

Three female students reported that they intended to use blogs in the future:

I intend to use this kind of technology in the future (blogs), within and without the institution; there are many reasons that motivate me to use it. I think it is very helpful in the communication process and in constructive interaction, which is a way to pass information and expertise on and share it. (S 10)

I have a desire to use blogs in the future in the enterprise/institution that I will work in, as well as for personal aspects, because it has a value in delivering information to others and interacting with them to learn and benefit from their expertise. (S 1)

Yes, I would like to use it in my career, because it can be a way to achieve my marketing goals. It is cooperative, educational, and interactive. (S 3)

On the other hand, a male student reported that he would use the application; however, he preferred to use newer emerging technology:

I would like to use blogs for different purposes in the future, including for education, cultural and entertainment purposes, and also for other purposes...

However, if I find another alternative tool instead of a blog, of course, I will use the new tool. I am sure that new technologies will emerge in the future and will replace the old ones, with advantages and elements more splendid and easier to use, but each tool will have its own distinctive character. (S 2)

Two other male students showed their unwillingness to use blogs in the future for several reasons. One student reported:

In the future, I could use a blog in my daily life if the interaction and transmission of the information in our society and the ability of the society to shape this technology for different purposes exists, but if not I would not use it. It depends on the community's acceptance of new technologies and the possibilities of using it in the scientific and educational settings ... (S 6)

The other student unwilling to use blogs in the future stated:

Personally, I will not use blogs in the future because there are many other options and suitable alternatives that can be used more effectively than blogs, such as Facebook and Twitter. These tools are more effective, simple, popular, and appropriate for enhancing organisations. These technologies are more popular in our society and there are many groups that prefer to use social networks because of their ease of use and effectiveness. I found Facebook and Twitter to be more effective than blogs, and I think they will be more beneficial regarding communication and information exchange. (S 8)

The instructor also reflects that the students intended to use the blogs:

I think most of our students would have blogs in the future. I noticed that many of them already have blogs that they use for personal purposes.

Difficulties Involved With Learning with Blogs

This section highlights the most important barriers related to student use and integration of online tools in their learning. The main barrier that faced students using blogs was the quality of the internet services, such as a slow internet connection. Nine out of ten students, as well as the instructor, reported this as an obstacle to using blogs within the course. Details of these barriers are presented below.

The main obstacle that remains that may impede the use of a blog is the lack of the progression of internet service and internet speed. I think that the availability of internet services in terms of speed, access, and quality would motivate us to use this online tool. However, no one wants to use blogs under the restrictions of the internet service in our society. (S 2)

The most difficult part of learning within this application is related to the limited internet services and internet slowness. (S 7)

Most of the difficulties we have encountered in regard to using the blog had to do with the internet service, because the network is slow sometimes. (S 1)

There is a difficulty, related to the internet services, that is the biggest factor for alienating people and moving away from using these technologies in education... the internet service does not have coverage all over the country and the exaggerated prices are making the users avoid using these learning tools, even for personal uses. (S 4)

There are no difficulties in using the blogs in regard to their characteristics and design, the difficulty is with the infrastructure of the internet, which is very weak, therefore browsing pages is very slow. (S 9)

I think that the main difficulty that we face regarding using these technologies is the acute shortage of the communications infrastructure that we have in this country...the internet services are inadequate in our society... (S 8)

This was also supported by the instructor who was not satisfied with the internet services in Oman:

...no significant difficulties, with the exception of two things: the time required in the follow-up posts students and their assessment, and the internet service, the internet is not at the required level at the university. It is too slow.

A few students mentioned that the computer lab's annual maintenance was another problem which faced them while they used their blogs. For example, two of them reported that:

The difficulties are related to the existing internet services and the number of computers, which is very few. These are two factors that we considered to be obstacles facing our use of the blog. (S 10)

I think there are no personal difficulties facing me, rather, the difficulties are related to the internet service and the lack of sufficient computers. There are not enough computers for the students. (S 6)

The instructor also agreed with the students with regard to computer maintenance:

...there is a problem in regards to the number of students in the classroom and the periodic maintenance of the computers. In the laboratory, for example, there are some computers that do not work properly and they need regular maintenance, and hence most students use their personal computers to avoid this problem.

Four students reported that lack of awareness could be the reason for not using online tools by others. For example, three students reported that:

The lack of awareness about this technology and its advantages is another barrier that prevents people from using it. (S 10)

...the lack of awareness about how to use this application on the part of individuals, and the lack of experience in how to design it. (S 7)

The lack of awareness of the community regarding blog influences its uses, and its positive yields of the communication process. (S 9)

Another student reported that some students copy information from online sources and just paste it into their blogs without mentioning the sources.

...Most of the students' participation was only cut and paste, so there is no reason to use it, and I did not find that there was any sophisticated and effective type of participation. (S 3)

Another student reported that the use of Moodle could be seen as a basic tool for teaching within the academic community:

The academic community might not accept the idea of using blogs in education, because they think that using Moodle is an alternative to teaching. (S 1)

Discussion and Conclusion

Moving toward the use and adopting of these tools and technologies within the courses in particular ways helps to produce a clear picture of optimal use rather than just describing the technologies and supposing their uses. One purpose of this study was to explore the actual use of blogs within LIS courses. Findings from previous studies showed different educational activities by using various online tools such as resources and information sharing and using these tools as discussion forum or boards.

The outcomes of the interviews indicate two main activities with regard to the use of blogs within LIS courses: (1) resources and information sharing, including sharing ideas, questions, articles, and links and finding information; and (2) using blog as platforms for discussion, such as asking questions and discussing course content.

These results are consistent with the literature review (e.g., Sarrafzadeh et al., 2010 and Luo, 2009). The results of the literature review, together with current study results, indicated that blogs are more often used as discussion forums and for resources and information sharing.

Most students and the instructor found blogs useful in terms of facilitating student participation and discussion in platforms that will be available to them after graduation, compared to the LMS Moodle. Blogging is an open gate which can be accessed after course completion and students will have the ability to customize, own, and manage their blogs, which supports their learning experiences within and across courses. As a previous section indicated, using blogs as a multimedia tool improved students' understanding of course content by giving them the ability to own and manage their blogs. Most students (6 out of 10) showed their willingness to use blogs in the future. It is also apparent from the responses from this group of students that male students were less likely to have an intention to use blogs in the future compared with females. While all female students showed their willingness to use blogs in the future, only one male student reported the same. The difference between male and female students regarding blogging activities can be explained in that some students (especially males) tend to use new technologies, as reported in the case study:

I will not use blogs in the future because there are many other options and suitable alternatives that can be used more effectively than blogs, such as Facebook and Twitter... I found Facebook and Twitter to be more effective than blogs. (S 8: Male)

Female students also were more concerned with privacy and are afraid to move onto other applications or tools that may not have provided as much privacy; blogs have provided several options regarding privacy and safety concerns. Female students were more confident in the use of blogs than male students. This correlates with results from interview with academic when he reported that:

Most of the privacy properties are not available in the other social networks, such as Facebook, and because of our society's nature, customs, and traditions, many of the female students avoid using some of the other applications that may reveal their identities or personal information. They usually use nicknames when designing blogs for reasons related to their

privacy, including the dissemination of information and sharing personal data, and other cultural and social factors.

As mentioned in the literature review, blogging is declining as a means of communication (e.g., Barnes & Lescault, 2012; Lenhart et al., 2010; and Churchill, 2009). It is relevant to note the declining use of blogs among students in the current study. The results of case study provide important reasons for the decline of blogging among students. The first reason is that the students blog due to assessment requirements. For example, one student reported the following:

I would like to talk about my self-evaluation regarding the use of blogs in this course. I got benefits from blogging, however, this benefit was limited to the course and we stopped doing this (blogging) after the course ended. (S 4)

The second reason is that some students switch to other applications after course completion as indicated in previous section. For example, one student said the following:

...if I find another alternative tool instead of a blog, of course, I will use the new tool. I am sure that new technologies will emerge in the future and will replace the old ones, with advantages and elements more splendid and easier to use. (S 2)

The popularity of blogging seems to be declining among students. The changing trends in SNSs use among students have led to a decline in using blogs and similar tools. Many students are blogging because of assessment requirements and tasks requiring the use of blogs in their courses, which supports the findings of Churchill (2009).

Major barriers to the use of blogs as reported by students are the lack of internet services, including the slowness of the internet, as well as safety and privacy concerns. The reason may correlate with telecommunications companies in the country which hold a monopoly on internet-service delivery and a lack of ICT infrastructure and the internet.

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